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AUTHOR(S):

Kargbo Morris, Kensuke Abu

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# Towards Transferring a Borderless Aspect: Freedom

国境を越えて「自由」を移転する試み

Kensuke Abu Kargbo Morris

1st year PhD student of Dept. of Social Informatics, Grad. School of Informatics, Kyoto Univ.  
3rd generation student of the Collaborative Graduate Program in Design



## Abstract

A sense of freedom is something that we all can access. Students from 3 universities in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan held a workshop to design a space that can facilitate a sense of freedom for university students in Hong Kong who were experiencing academic stress. Collaborative design of a space and activities to tackle stress was a great learning experience for the members of the Lifestyle group (one of 6 participating groups), who organized and implemented the concept in Hong Kong at the end of May, 2018.

## 1. Introduction

The Design School of Kyoto University (KU) in collaboration with National Cheng Kung University (NCKU), Taiwan and Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), participated in KU-HKBU-NCKU Joint Design Workshop 2018 (Design School in Asia 2018). I had the opportunity to participate in this event. The workshop had 3 phases and followed a logical structure for the social-design process for the Kyoto and Hong Kong rounds as described<sup>i</sup>. We held "Kyoto Round" in the beginning of April and "Hong Kong Round" in the end of May. During the course of the design phase in Kyoto, participants were exposed to meta-design using design principles. The theme of the workshop was 'Transfer'.

The goal of this workshop was to identify good aspects of Kyoto city and

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<sup>i</sup> Yusuke Kita: "How Can We Design Social-Design-Oriented Workshops?", Proceedings of the 65th Annual Conference of JSSD, pp. 164-165, 2018. (In Japanese)

‘transfer’ these concepts to tackle problems in Hong Kong during the implementation phase. Fieldwork was designed and conducted to identify good aspects of Kyoto city. At this stage anything that was found to be amazing was recorded by the students and used to compare to problems presented by Hong Kong students. In this article I will talk about one of resources we identified during fieldwork and the solution proposed by the Lifestyle group (one of numerous groups) during the implementation phase in Kyoto. This workshop presented a great opportunity to tackle problems using students from 3 different universities and multiple cultural backgrounds.

## 2. Transferring a Concept: Freedom

### 2.1 Problems and Resources

After identifying the general problem of stress among Hong Kong students, our group (called the Lifestyle group) decided to focus on the academic stress among university students in Hong Kong. In specific, HKBU students have high levels of stress. The high levels of stress give a feeling that they are living under other people’s expectations and there is little sense of controlling their future. This stressful problem leads to a lack of a sense of freedom which may affect procrastination levels for some students.

To understand the problem, we developed personae of HBKU students we wanted to target. Persona A was an undergraduate student between the ages of 18 and 22. Persona B was a graduate student over the age of 22. For both personae, the student has academic stress, studies a lot and is worried about the future. Utilizing personae gave us a better idea of the people affected by stress and helped us determine our target group.

There were many amazing resources found in Kyoto during the fieldwork. One of which was the Yoshida dormitory of KU an old dormitory which KU students manage (pic. 1). The KU students also raise chickens and goats can be seen around the yard of the dorm. Among the list of resources found in Kyoto, the Yoshida dormitory was very interesting because KU students were managers



pic. 1 - Entrance to Yoshida Dormitory

of their living space and the academic pressure existing in different parts of the university seemed to be non-existent. This inspired us to transfer the concept of the Yoshida dormitory to Hong Kong, a space where HKBU students are in control of their affairs away from the normal academic schedules and planned activities of the university.

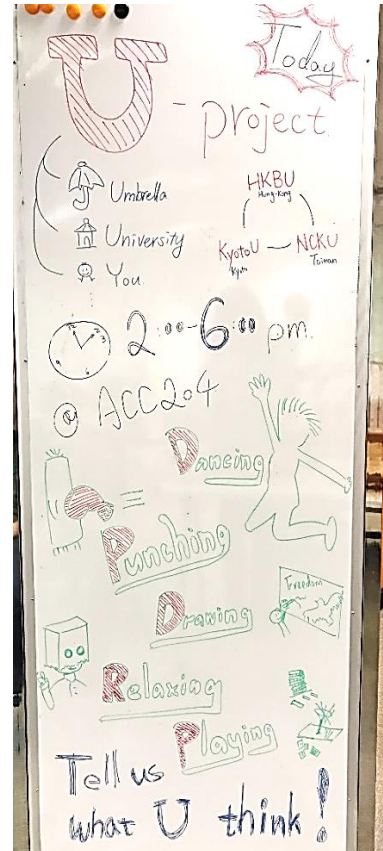
## 2.2 Solution

The concept of a space was not enough since activities within the space are also needed. The space can be seen as the ‘umbrella’ that will cover many activities that help HKBU students relax and feel in control of their lives. Out of the inspiration from the concept of the Yoshida dormitory, the U-Project was conceived (pic. 2). The ‘U’ means **umbrella** (signifies the space), **university** (location of space), **us** (teams of students working together) and **you** (the university student in Hong Kong who may be experiencing academic stress). In order to see if this idea makes sense, we definitely needed a physical space and activities to help HKBU students relax and reduce their stress.

Although the general problem was stress among Hong Kong students, in order to implement the idea, we needed to narrow the problem to make realistic activities we can use to test our concept of the U-Project. The space was implemented in a computer lab at HK Baptist University. We designed exercises and activities to that were done at the space. Initial decoration and rearranging of furniture was done before the start of the activities.

## 2.3 Implementation

One method people use to deal with stress is to exercise. This led us to our first activity, ‘Shake-It-Off’. In this activity participants had the chance to dance and enjoy themselves. This activity was aimed at the lack of a sense of freedom. To give participants more options in this activity, a video game was



pic. 2 - Sketch of U-Project concept

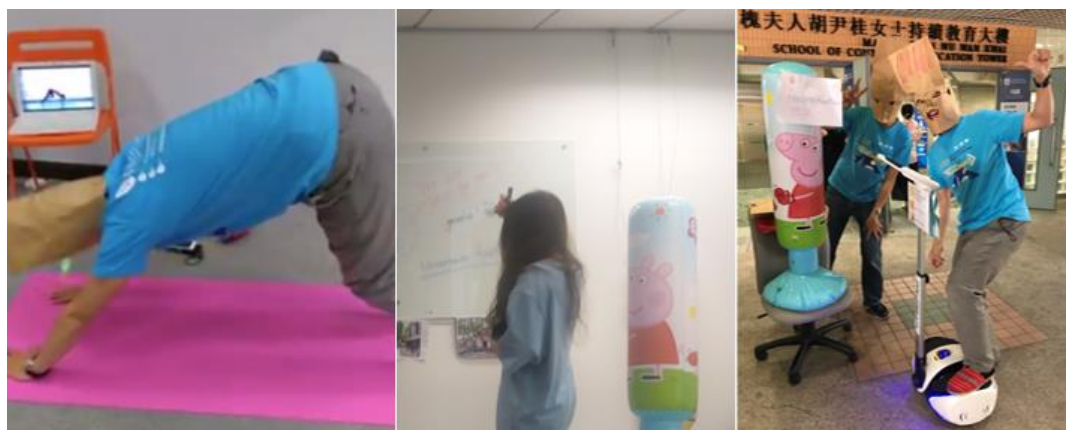


pic. 3 - Organizers supporting students during the dancing activity using paper bags as masks proposed to remove the barrier of different dancing abilities of participants since everyone followed the same instructions and did the same dance moves. Also, since some participants may be too shy to dance in public, paper bags were introduced in order for them to cover their faces. Additionally, shy participants received support from organizers belonging to the Lifestyle group who danced with them (pic. 3).



pic. 4 – Participant doing Activity 2

Although students may have stress, the source of this feeling can vary. The academic stress they may feel also can be intertwined with stress from other aspects of their lives. This led us to our second activity, ‘Hit-It-Off’ (pic. 4). A student writes the name of the thing that they have a problem with and stick it to a punching bag. This activity focused on giving the student a chance to feel in control of their future and face



pic. 5 – Activities made during preparation: Yoga (L), Wall of Freedom (C), Segway-like-vehicle (R)

the things they believe to be contributing to their stress.

Unplanned activities spurred during the day of implementation since we found useful materials in the space provided that we used create new activities. This was great since it gave us a chance to have a greater variety of activities to foster a sense of freedom. The yoga activity was created because of a yoga mat that was found, this activity was well received by participants and group members, some of which, practiced yoga for the first time (pic. 5). We also found a Segway-like-vehicle (a two-wheeled, self-balancing personal transporter) which participants used to ride around the room. A glass was labelled the “Wall of Freedom” where participants wrote anything that comes to mind.



pic. 6 –  
Participant organized activity

Participants who may want to use the space but are not interested in physical activities were given the opportunity to play board games and also do an activity of their choosing based on their group decisions (pic. 6). The activities created by organizers were planned before the start of the workshop whereas the participant organized activities were by participants during the workshop.

## 2. 4 Feedback

tab. 1 - Responses of participants

Part One - Assessing Space and Activities	
1	Q. Does the layout of the space give you a sense of freedom? A. <b>Yes (7), Not Sure (2)</b>
2	Q. Did the screaming help you relax? A. <b>Yes (6), No (1), Maybe (2)</b>
3	Q. Which activities made you feel a sense of freedom? A. <b>Dancing (5), Punching (3), Self-Organized (6), Yoga (2), Segway-like-vehicle (1)</b>
4	Q. I felt more stressed out after doing the following activities: A. <b>Punching (1), Self-Organized (4), Yoga (1)</b>
5	Q. I was able to forget about my stress during the following activities: A. <b>Dancing (5), Punching (4), Self-Organized (6)</b>
Part Two - Assessing the student	
1	Q. Do you have a problem with stress from school? A. <b>Yes (3), No (3), Maybe (2), No answer (1)</b>
2	Q. Do you have a problem with managing your time as a result of the stress? A. <b>Yes (3), No (4), Maybe (1), No answer (1)</b>
3	Q. What activities do you do in your daily life to help with having a sense of freedom? A. <b>Sleep (1), Physical Exercise (4), Dancing (1), Singing (1)</b>
Number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents who chose the same answer.	



We designed a questionnaire to get feedback from workshop participants about their experience within the space and the feasibility of the space and its activities. The survey was not mandatory since we wanted to have as little rules as possible with the space to foster a greater sense of freedom and little obligation. To this end, 9 participants provided feedback through the survey. The survey was divided into two parts. Part one was assessment of the space and activities and part two

tab. 2 - Individual participant feelings before and after activities

No.	Feeling before	Feeling after
1	Interest	Relaxed
2	Afraid	Relaxed
3	Interest	Fun
4	None	Perfect
5	Sleepy	Excited
6	Confused	Unforgettable
7	Curious	Happy
8	Curious	Relaxed
9	Tired	Relaxed

focused on the respondent. Table 1 highlights some questions responses received. Participants were also asked, as part of the survey, to use one word to describe their feeling before and after doing the activities (tab. 2). There was generally positive feedback about their feelings after doing the activities.

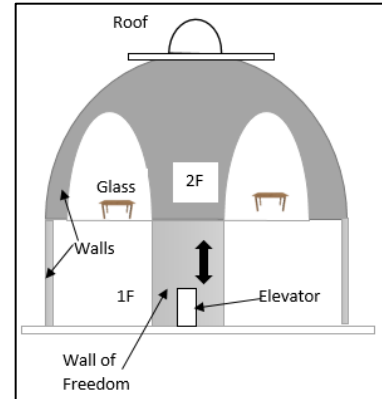
### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Did this make sense in the first place?

In the design stage we highlighted two objectives, providing a space for students to help reduce their stress and use some activities to help students relax. The workshop we implemented to test our idea gave us a lot of insights. During the design phase, although I knew what stress was, understanding the problem was very difficult since I have never travelled to Hong Kong before. Furthermore, I have never studied in Hong Kong. During this stage, I kept wondering, 'how do I contribute a solution to a culture that I do not even know? Since Kyoto and Hong Kong are very different, can a concept of Kyoto be transferred into Hong Kong's culture?' There was only one way to find out...go see for yourself! That is what I did.

During the implementation, I was able to understand more about the problem we identified and speak to other Hong Kong students besides the group members who came to Kyoto. The workshop gave us a first step in understanding what parts of our idea was feasible and what parts needed improvement. The feedback from the respondents confirm that some of our objectives were met since some participants did feel a sense of freedom when utilizing the space.

The space itself, was a great place to start with. However, it was a room that was surrounded with walls. Although the door was always open, the layout of the room may have decreased the sense of freedom to enter and exit from different location of the room. Based on my experience and further discussions with faculty organizers during the workshop, a semi-closed room may be more ideal to give a sense of freedom through limited borders (pic. 7). I noticed that the dancing activity was most enjoyable when participants did it in groups. One participant refused to dance by herself while others preferred using a mask when dancing.



pic.7 - Semi-closed space concept

### 3.2 Looking forward

We decorated a physical space to give students a sense of freedom and control. Although a dedicated space will be great, universities located within cities usually have limited space. This led me to wonder, will it be better to focus on designing a way for students to create a 'mental space' where they can escape to and have a sense of freedom? 'Mental space' will not be visible by other people and can be based on anything the students in general may want. Academically speaking, 'mental space' is seen as an idealized cognitive model which is invisible to reality<sup>ii</sup>. As opposed to a physical space, students can be able to access their personal mental space in any location and escape the feeling of stress and pressure that may be present. This idea seems more difficult to design and implement and can have a high initial cost of time taken to create such a space in the student's mind. Meditation is a technique that helps with gaining control of your thoughts and focusing your attention on healthy thoughts for productivity. Can this technique be applied to design to create such a space in students' minds? With the advancement of Artificial Intelligence, we may be closer to designing mental spaces based on conceptual blending, a term introduced by Fauconnier and Turner<sup>iii</sup>. The

<sup>ii</sup> Evans, Vyvyan; Green, Melanie (2014). "Meaning constructions and mental spaces". Cognitive Linguistics An introduction. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. ISBN 0 7486 1832 5.

<sup>iii</sup> Mark Turner, Gilles Fauconnier: The Way We Think. Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities. New York: Basic Books 2002, p. 37



lessons learnt from my experience in Hong Kong leads me to believe that this can be possible in the future under the U-Project.

#### 4. Conclusion

Using design principles to solve complex social problems present many challenges, one of which is cultural consideration. Multidisciplinary and multicultural teams may help decrease these challenges when designing solutions. My experience during this workshop taught me a lot about how other cultures view stress and their way of dealing with it. Although cultures may be different, stress affects us as human beings. Cultural aspects in one country can be implemented in another country with a strong foundation of understanding of both cultures. I am happy to have worked with a group of students and lecturers who made our workshop a success with their different viewpoints and cultural backgrounds.

## Lifestyle Group Members

- focused on transferring a way of living between Kyoto and Hong Kong



Dr. Yusuke KITA  
(KU)

Japan



Dr. Martin CHOY  
(HKBU)

Hong Kong



Yuki NG  
(HKBU)

Hong Kong



Simone SANTUARI  
(HKBU)

Italy



Guozhong LI  
(HKBU)

China



Coleman YU  
(KU)

Hong Kong



Sivakarn PAVEENUCH  
(NCKU)

Thailand



Fang-Tzu LIN  
(NCKU)

Taiwan



Lei BO  
(NCKU)

Taiwan

### Inquiry towards studies of design

- + Can a sense of freedom be achieved without design?
- + Can the design process make some problems worse?
- + How do we use or tweak the design process in cultures where problems are unspoken? How do students prepare to tackle such problems in society that are unspoken?
- + Is there a trade-off between design based on common global needs and design based on culture?